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SF Charter Commission

Charter Revision: What's it all about?

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1932 Introducing the new streamlined City Charter!

In 1932 the voters of San Francisco approved a new City Charter to meet the needs of the 1930s. The Charter said what it meant and meant what it said . . . "Keep your hands off City Hall!"

Charter Revision: I

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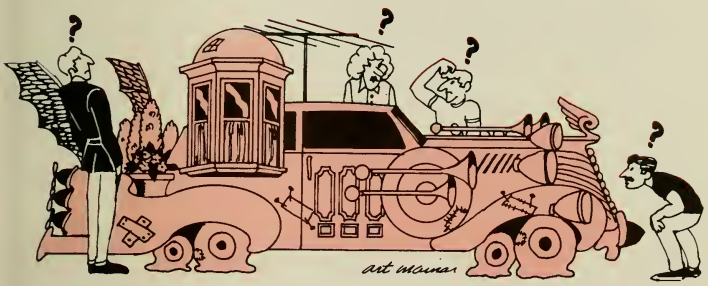
The City Charter, now available with over 500 accessories!



Since 1932 the City Charter has been amended more than 500 times, burying the original idea in a cumbersome patchwork of often-conflicting details, and preventing administrators from making routine managerial decisions without the expense of first taking them to the voters.

about your future!

Char-ter (char ' ter). n. constitution; the basic principles and laws of a nation, state or social group that determine the powers and duties of the government and guarantee certain rights to the people in it; specifically, the Charter of the City and County of San Francisco.

Why change the charter?

Because you said so.

The people of San Francisco voted twice to review and revise the Charter — in June and November, 1978. At the November election you elected 15 commissioners to do this. The revised Charter must be completed by August 7, 1980, and you will vote to accept or reject it in the November, 1980 general election.

Because we need to get our money's worth from scarce tax dollars.

With tax cuts and spending limits come a greater demand that every tax dollar deliver maximum results.

The City needs flexibility to reorganize, to cut back and to trim departments and bureaus. It's a bad time to have hands tied by a restrictive Charter that often prohibits modern management innovations that save money while improving productivity and the delivery of services.

Because the 1980s demand greater efficiency and accountability.

The role of City government has changed since 1932, when an attitude of keep-your-nose-out-of-the-bureaucrats'-business seemed to make sense. Today the Charter stands in the way of new demands for efficiency, cost-effectiveness and accountability to the public.

The current Charter was written in 1932 with the specific goal of limiting the involvement of elected officials in San Francisco government. As a result, important decision-making powers were transferred to people who never have to answer to you, the voter.

Under the noble banner of ending scandals, the authors of the 1932 Charter set up a tangled maze of overlapping authority and responsibility that now makes City Hall bureaucratic buck-passing the rule, rather than the exception.

The current Charter Commission has attempted to place authority and responsibility in elected officials directly accountable to the people.

Because we all have a role in making government work better.

The authors of the 1932 Charter attempted to bring government under control by establishing rigid internal systems and procedures.

Today, well-informed neighborhood and civic groups, the news media and state and federal funding sources have emerged as important external checks, to make sure City government performs with the best interests of the public in mind.

A new Charter should reflect this by making sure decisions about essential services are made openly by officials who must respond to the will of the people.

Because we need a Charter we can understand.

The current Charter is so complicated and detailed, with over 500 amendments written by hundreds of different people over the years, that only the most skilled attorneys with plenty of time on their hands can figure out what it means.

The original Charter has ballooned into more than 100,000 words (compared to 8000 words in the U.S. Constitution) filling hundreds of pages. Several amendments conflict directly with other amendments. Unworkable regulations regarding personnel, budgeting, purchasing and administration force City employees to circumvent the Charter every day just to keep government functioning.

The City Attorney has said that his staff of 48 lawyers spend about half their time interpreting the Charter.

If we can't understand how government works, we won't know how to help it work better.

Here's what you can do to help write a new San Francisco City Charter:

- Attend the upcoming series of hearings.
- Schedule a speaker for your next neighborhood or civic group meeting.
- Send your ideas in writing to the Commission.

Contact the Charter Commission office for details.

Charter Revision: It's about your future!

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Who is the Charter Commission?

The 15-member Charter Commission has, over the past 18 months, met with thousands of San Franciscans at hundreds of meetings throughout the City. The Commissioners themselves, who are not paid, reflect the diversity of San Francisco's communities, including labor and business leaders, neighborhood activists, Republicans and Democrats, a former Chief of Police, women, senior citizens and representatives of the Asian, Black, Gay and Latino communities.

THE CHARTER COMMISSIONERS: Front row: *Samuel W. Walker; Pat Jackson; Rodney Johnson; Wilson Chang, Chair; Steven A. Waldhorn.* Back row: *James Haas; Jack Morrison; Leo Jed; Jack Webb; Pat Schultz; Thomas Cahill; Haig G. Mardikian;* absent, *Agnes Chan, Frank Fitch, Eulalio Frausto.*

THE COMMISSIONERS AT WORK: *Frank Fitch; Wilson Chang; Agnes Chan; Haig G. Mardikian; Thomas Cahill; Eulalio Frausto.*

The San Francisco Charter Commission
170 Fell Street, Room 16 • San Francisco 94102 • Tel: 552-7887

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